

# eLearning Centers Bring Broadband Internet to Far Western Kentucky

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Fulton County eLearning Center

*Credit Murray State University's Office of Regional Outreach, Facebook*

Murray State University, the Kentucky Council on Post-secondary Education and the Commonwealth Office of Broadband Outreach and Development are collaborating to bring free, public access, broadband internet service to counties in west Kentucky. The four river counties in westernmost Kentucky are among the most in-need of service: Ballard, Carlisle, Hickman and Fulton. On Sounds Good, MSU Regional Outreach Director Gina Winchester and Regional Outreach Coordinator Jonathan Baskin describe the effort.

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Listening...

12:17

## **Origins of West Kentucky Broadband Project**

The Commonwealth Office of Broadband Outreach and Development began the initiative about one year ago. Spearheaded by the CPE, they put together a rural education taskforce in order to figure out ways to implement educational programming in rural communities. Using federal stimulus money, mapped broadband access and usage across the state to identify the "most needy counties." Four of the neediest counties turned out to be the four river counties in far western Kentucky: Ballard, Carlisle, Hickman and Fulton.

## **Addressing Educational and Economic Development Needs**

Rural eLearning Centers are being built in these counties to address educational and economic development needs. As of July 2014, three centers are open: two in Fulton County and one in Hickman County. Plans are under way for the other two counties. In Fulton County, one is located in the public library in the city of Fulton; the other located near the Fulton County School Systems in Hickman, so that students can use it after hours and on weekends. The center in Clinton, in Hickman County, opened last Friday.

Gina Winchester says these locations are strategically located so that students and community members can have access to it.

"We want to help raise educational attainment level in all of our 18 county service region."

The centers will be used to implement workshops, training and seminars to benefit the community. Training will be led by community members and courses are designed based on the needs and interests of each particular community, and may include: how to use a computer, how to do taxes online, how to apply for a job line, how to build economic development and precision agriculture.



Jonathan Baskin and Gina Winchester on Sounds Good

### **Long-Term Benefits**

Jonathan Baskin says the goal is to provide a way for people in the community to become familiar with broadband access and what it can do for them. He hopes that people will realize the importance of Internet resources and sees it more as a gainful need than a luxury. If a customer base for broadband internet is created in far western Kentucky, and people have access to resources in their homes or businesses, they will no longer need the eLearning Centers and can successfully conclude the project.

Winchester shares the story of a student in Hickman County High School recently took 23 college credit hours through her school system, but didn't have a computer at home so she was struggled to complete her work. Had she had access to a computer with broadband connection, she may have found her work easier to complete and could have potentially achieved even more.

With access to broadband learning centers, people living in rural communities will have access to the same tools and educational opportunities as people living in larger, more technologically-connected cities.